

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY DACCA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 7720

INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU IMMEDIATE

AMCONSAL CALCUTTA IMMEDIATE

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 3947

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, BG

SUBJECT: KHONDAKAR MUSHTAQUE AHMED: NEW PRESIDENT OF BANGLADESH

REF: DACCA 3941; DACCA 3943; DACCA 3945

1. THERE FOLLOWS A RESUME OF BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON NEW PRESIDENT OF BANGLADESH, KHONDAKAR MUSHTAQUE AHMED, FROM WHICH IT WILL BE SEEN THAT HE HAS CONSISTENTLY REPRESENTED HIMSELF AS PRO-AMERICAN AND THAT, PERHAPS IN CONSEQUENCE, HE HAS HAD REPUTATION AS ANTI-INDIAN AND ANTI-SOVIET.

2. MUSHTAQUE WAS BORN IN COMILLA DISTRICT, REPORTEDLY IN 1918. HE OBTAINED EARLIER DEGREES AND LAW DEGREE AT DACCA UNIVERSITY AND WAS A FOUNDER AND JOINT SECRETARY OF AWAMI LEAGUE IN 1949. HE WAS FIRST ARRESTED IN 1946 FOR HIS PART IN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT; JAILED IN 1952 DURING BANGLA LANGUAGE MOVEMENT; DETAINED IN 1958 UNDER MARTIAL
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LAW ADMINISTRATION FOR THREE YEARS; AND FINALLY DETAINED

FROM 1966 TO 1968 ALONG WITH OTHER AWAMI LEAGUE LEADERS. ELECTED A PROVINCIAL LEGISLATOR IN 1954, HE WAS DEFEATED IN 1965 WHEN HE RAN FOR NATIONAL LEGISLATURE. HE SERVED AS PRESIDENT OF THE ANTI-AYUB EAST PAKISTAN DEMOCRATIC ACTION COMMITTEE IN 1968 AND ATTENDED THENROUND TABLE CONFERENCE AT LAHORE IN 1969. BEFORE MARCH 1971 HE WAS ONE OF THREE VICE PRESIDENTS OF THE AWAMI LEAGUE AND PRESIDENT OF THE COMILLA DISTRICT AWAMI LEAGUE. DURING MUJIBNAGAR GOVERNMENT IN 1971, MUSHTAQUE WAS FOREIGN MINISTER AND MINISTER OF LAW AND PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS. AFTER INDEPENDENCE, HE WAS BRIEFLY MINISTER OF LAW AND PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS, AND LAND REVENUES, THEN SERVED AS MINISTER OF POWER, IRRIGATION, AND FLOOD CONTROL; IN JANUARY 1974 HE BECAME MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND FOREIGN TRADE, A POSITION HE HELD UNTIL TODAY.

3. ASSESSMENT. SMALL AND FRAIL IN APPEARANCE, MUSHTAQUE IS FAR FROM A FORCEFUL PERSONALITY AND IS ALMOST TOTALLY LACKING IN THE KIND OF DYNAMISM AND CHARISMA WHICH CHARACTERIZED SHEIKH MUJIB. SINCE INDEPENDENCE HE HAS HAD THE REPUTATION OF BEING A LEADER OF THE MODERATE PRO-WESTERN SEGMENT OF THE RULING PARTY AND AN OPPONENT OF TAJUDDIN AHMED DURING THE LATTER'S TENURE AS THE INFLUENTIAL FINANCE MINISTER. MUSHTAQUE REPORTEDLY BLAMED HIS LOSS OF THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO AFTER INDEPENDENCE ON THE INFLUENCE OF TAJUDDIN AND THE INDIAN LEADERSHIP; SUPPOSEDLY MUSHTAQUE WAS CONSIDERED TOO PRO-AMERICAN. (FYI: WE HAVE UNSUBSTANTIATED RUMORS, HOWEVER, THAT TAJUDDIN, WHO WAS FIRED BY MUJIB LAST OCTOBER AND HAS BEEN PUBLICLY INACTIVE SINCE THEN, MAY BE SUPPORTING THE COUP. END FYI.) MUSHTAQUE'S BITTERNESS TOWARD INDIA'S PERCEIVED ROLE IN THAT PERIOD MAY HAVE BEEN IN PART THE CAUSE OF THE HARD LINE HE TOLD AS FLOOD CONTROL MINISTER ON THE FARRAKA BARRAGE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE GOI.

4. MANY BUSINESSMEN HAVE CONSIDERED MUSHTAQUE TO BE SYMPATHETIC TOWARD COMMERCIAL INTERESTS AND PRIVATE ENTERPRISE AND SOME PUBLICLY EXPRESSED PLEASURE AT HIS APPOINTMENT TO THE COMMERCE MINISTRY. IN 1972, MUSHTAQUE TOLD EMBASSY OFFICERS THAT HE WAS IN FAVOR OF A SOCIALIST-CONFIDENTIAL

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TYPE ECONOMY BUT NOT SOCIALISM WHICH HE DEFINED AS UNDEMOCRATIC AND REGIMENTED. HE LEFT THE IMPRESSION THAT HE WAS UNHAPPY AT THE POSSIBILITY OF EXCESSIVE INDIAN AND SOVIET INFLUENCE IN BANGLADESH. ALTHOUGH DURING THE PAKISTAN PERIOD, MUSHTAQUE HAD BEEN HIGHLY CRITICAL OF US AID TO THE AYUB REGIME AS BUTTRESSING A REPRESSIVE GOVERNMENT, IN THE 1972 CONVERSATION WITH EMBASSY OFFICERS HE EXPRESSED HOPE THAT THE US WOULD PROVIDE A COUNTER-

BALANCE TO SOVIET AND INDIAN INFLUENCE.

5. IN A MAY 1974 COURTESY CALL BY AMBASSADOR, MUSHTAQUE PRIVATELY ASSERTED TO AMBASSADOR HIS CREDENTIALS AS A PRO-AMERICAN MEMBER OF THE BDG CABINET, A REPUTATION, HE SAID, WHICH HIS ENEMIES TRIED TO USE AGAINST HIM. HE SPOKE OF THE NEED FOR LARGE-SCALE US ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO HELP MUJIB, WHOM HE DESCRIBED AS A "TRUE DEMOCRAT" AT HEART, TO AVOID PRESSURES TO MOVE TO THE LEFT. SINCE THAT TIME ASSOCIATES OF MUSHTAQUE HAVE TOLD US ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS OF HIS "PRO-AMERICAN" STANCE. DURING DINNER PARTY AUGUST 10, AT WHICH AMBASSADOR WAS PRESENT, MUSHTAQUE IN CONVERSATION WITH OTHER BANGALEES MADE POINTED REFERENCE TO THE "FREE WORLD SOURCES" OF FOOD ASSISTANCE TO BANGLADESH AND COMMENTED UPON FACT THAT "NO ONE VOTES IN BANGLADESH NOW."

6. HOW VIROROUSLY MUSHTAQUE MAY HAVE OBJECTED TO MUJIB'S INSTITUTION OF A ONE-PARTY AUTHORITARIAN PRESIDENTIAL STATE WE DO NOT KNOW. YOUNGER LEADERS OF BAKSAL WHO OPPOSED THIS TREND HAVE TOLD EMBASSY OFFICERS THAT MUSHTAQUE HAS BEEN PASSIVE IN PRESENT PARTY COUNCILS. WE ALSO DO NOT KNOW WHAT ROLE HE HAS PLAYED IN THE MILITARY COUP AGAINST SHEIKH MUJIB NOR TO WHAT EXTENT HE MAY BE A FIGUREHEAD. WE HAVE ONLY ONE REPORT ON HIS ROLE SO FAR, AND IT SUGGESTS THAT MUSHTAQUE HAD NO KNOWLEDGE OF THE COUP UNTIL HE WAS ASKED, THIS MORNING, TO SERVE AS PRESIDENT.
BOSTER

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